

SPECIAL REPORT

Embattled Bigots:
A Split in the Ranks of the Holocaust Denial Movement

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Embattled Bigots:
A Split in the Ranks of the Holocaust Denial Movement

Introduction

A bitter dispute has recently engulfed the Holocaust denial movement in the United States, resulting in a split in the ranks of its main propaganda outlet, the Institute for Historical Review (IHR), a pseudo-academic institution whose business is peddling hateful lies. Within the past year the feud has included these dramatic events: lawsuits filed by IHR's founder against several IHR staffers, their countersuit against him, his issuing of a new, competing Holocaust denial publication, and a violent physical altercation at the IHR office between the two factions. It is unclear what the schism will ultimately mean for this insidious movement.

The Institute for Historical Review is the primary force in the international anti-Semitic propaganda movement known as Holocaust denial. Through its publications and periodic conferences, the IHR has attempted to garner scholarly respectability and popular visibility for what it claims to be historical "revisionism." [See ADL report Hitler's Apologists: The Anti-Semitic Propaganda of Holocaust "Revisionism" (1993)]

Since 1979, the IHR has enjoyed increased attention within the extremist community, despite significant legal and financial setbacks. The best known of these reversals occurred in 1985 when IHR agreed in a court-approved settlement to pay \$90,000 to Mel Mermelstein, an Auschwitz concentration camp survivor. Mermelstein had sued the organization for failing to pay him a \$50,000 "reward" it had offered for "proof" that the Nazis operated execution gas chambers at the concentration camps in WWII.

Ironically, the Mermelstein case and other financial difficulties, such as a 1984 fire at IHR headquarters, are not responsible for the most serious problem facing the group. It seems that after a decade and a half of nefarious activity, the IHR's most formidable challenge is a conflict between its founder and its own activists.

Power Struggle

IHR's internal politics are as contentious as its "revisionist" theories about the Holocaust are hateful and absurd. Recently, a power struggle within IHR culminated in the ousting of the group's founder, the longtime anti-Semite Willis Carto. Carto -- who has lamented Hitler's defeat at the hands of the "International Jews" -- was ejected as IHR's leader in September 1993 after the Institute's editorial staff and board of directors voted to terminate association with him.

A month later, on October 15, Carto unsuccessfully tried physically to

"retake" the IHR building and was dragged from the premises by the police as he reportedly screamed, "You're killing me." The scuffle then moved into the courtroom, where lawsuits and countersuits have been filed regarding who would head the organization. The victor would not only control IHR, but also a bequest of \$10 million in stock share certificates from the late granddaughter of the inventor Thomas Edison. A key figure in the coup against Carto summed up the imbroglio by stating, "I think it's all about money."

Background: IHR. Carto and the Holocaust Denial Movement

The Institute for Historical Review was founded by Willis Carto in 1979 and is currently based in Newport Beach, California. In 1980, Carto and his wife, Elisabeth, filed for IHR's business license under the title "Legion for the Survival of Freedom, Inc." doing business as "The Noontide Press/Institute for Historical Review."

Three motivations animate the propaganda of the Holocaust denial movement:
(1) the rehabilitation of Hitler and Nazi ideology; (2) the promotion of new formulations to express traditional anti-Jewish conspiracy theories, and (3) the undermining of the moral legitimacy of the State of Israel. IHR materials and activities clearly reflect these themes.

Willis Carto, 67, began peddling anti-Semitism and extremism more than two decades before the inception of IHR. Liberty Lobby, founded in 1955 and currently the nation's largest anti-Jewish propaganda organization, was also the brainchild of Carto and continues to be his chief propaganda vehicle. Carto additionally founded the far-right Populist Party in 1983; in 1988, the party ran as its presidential candidate the former neo-Nazi and Klan leader David Duke. (Duke received 47,047 votes from eleven states in this campaign.) Since the 1988 election, the Populist Party, like IHR, has broken with Carto; it nonetheless continues to promote the same extremist agenda. Until the IHR/Carto schism in 1993, Liberty Lobby promoted IHR and Holocaust denial in its weekly newspaper, The Spotlight. Recent issues of The Spotlight - which has been estimated to have a circulation of nearly 100,000 -- vilify IHR and refer to its leaders as "conspirators."

The IHR, whose membership is comprised of pseudo-academics and veteran hate propagandists, attempts to operate under the guise of scholarship. It

publishes a bi-monthly glossy magazine, The Journal of Historical Review, and holds annual conventions where self styled "revisionist historians" present papers on a variety of subjects -- but the agenda caters on debunking the Holocaust. Regular speakers have included:

- * Robert Faurisson, a former University of Lyon (France) literature professor who was convicted and fined in French courts in July 1983 and April 1991 for promoting racism and denying the reality of the Holocaust.
- * Ditlieb Felderer of Sweden, who claims that Anne Frank's diary is a hoax and who was convicted in May 1983 by a Swedish court for distributing anti-Semitic hate mail, including locks of hair and pieces of fat which he alleged belonged to Holocaust victims.
- * British author David Irving, who has described himself as a "mild fascist," and who has commented, "Without Hitler, the State of Israel probably would not exist today, so to that extent he was probably the Jews' greatest friend."
- * Dr. Arthur Butz of Northwestern University, a professor of electrical engineering and computer science who wrote The Hoax of the Twentieth Century, one of the first Holocaust-denying books.
- * The late Ivor Benson, a one-time politician in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) and pro Apartheid activist.

The nature of the conventions and publications indicates that IHR is clearly less concerned with historical truth than it is with promoting anti-Semitism.

Holocaust denial depends on the embrace of a mass conspiracy theory -- the allegation that Jews, academics, historians and others falsified or maliciously distorted all testimonies, reports and pictures of the Holocaust. Holocaust deniers explain Jewish motivation behind the "Zionist conspiracy" as a means to gain power and influence. In Carto's opening speech to the 1981 IHR convention, he asserted that "Zionists" are "predators" who exploit the "guilt" of Western society and "offer us expiation for the sins of our fathers by giving us the magnificent opportunity to contribute to the building of God's promised land for God's chosen people with our tax money." The IHR's game plan is simple; by legitimizing "debate" over the settled historical veracity of the Holocaust, deniers hope to sow the seed of doubt, which in turn will foster

anti-Semitism in the form of resentment against those who have promoted this "hoax": the Jews.

Mutiny at the IHR

On October 4, 1993, according to court records, Willis Carto received a letter signed by four senior staff members of The Journal of Historical Review (Thomas Marcellus, Mark Weber, Ted O'Keefe and Greg Raven) announcing that the IHR was "firing" him. Although Carto, in a court document, contended that he had "no inkling of their conspiracy to take over," trouble between Carto and his staffers reportedly had been building for some time. Carto's reputed highhandedness towards his employees and associates appears to be the primary reason for his ouster, in addition to several reasons listed by Marcellus in a court declaration, including: Elisabeth Carto's purchase of a new Cadillac with IHR funds; Carto's frugality in taking out an insufficient insurance policy (a 1984 fire had destroyed the IHR warehouse and offices and the \$50,000 insurance policy purchased by Carto covered only a fraction of the damage); his skimping on pay and health benefits; and his "launching and subsequent mishandling of the reward offer" in the Mel Mermelstein affair.

Marcellus asserted, moreover, that the primary point of contention rested on the editorial direction of The Journal of Historical Review. To the editorial staffs dismay, Carto allegedly wanted to reduce Holocaust denial features -- the publication's stock in trade -- by 80%, eventually to abandon the issue along with the name of the journal entirely. Furthermore, Marcellus accused Carto of trying to turn the journal into a "racist" and "Nazi" publication -- as if the IHR's Holocaust-denial agenda weren't inherently anti-Semitic and pro-Nazi from the outset. Carto, of course, denies the allegations against him and insists that the rebellious staff members were manipulated by "sinister forces," as he put it in a letter to Holocaust denier Arthur Butz. This letter was included in a mailing from Carto to IHR contributors and contained attacks on ADL and Mel Mermelstein.

In light of the tension between Carto and the staffers, Marcellus and O'Keefe decided to take the issue to the board of the Legion for the Survival of Freedom, Inc., IHR's parent organization. According to the Los Angeles Times (May 8, 1994) Marcellus described their decision in a court declaration: "Having suffered Carto's machinations, hair-brained [sic] schemes, mismanagement, insults and irrationality long enough, the senior

staff met to determine the course of action to stop Carto from taking harmful actions." It was alleged that the Legion for the Survival of Freedom, Inc., had listed a corporate director who had been dead for five years; that the board had never met, and that Willis Carto was the sole and controlling voice in the corporation.

Most importantly, at stake in this controversy was over \$10 million in stock certificates bequeathed to the Legion by Jean Farrel, the granddaughter of Thomas Edison. The summer before the October "coup," Marcellus reportedly discovered a \$100,000 bank order for Carto's Liberty Lobby, drawn from the Jean Farrel bequest. According to Marcellus, Carto directed his wife to set up a corporation for the sole purpose of controlling the money and loaning it back to the Legion -- thus making the Legion a less attractive target for potential lawsuits. Because the IHR advertised itself as the Legion, the senior staffers demanded control of the money Mrs. Farrel had bequeathed to the parent company.

After discovering and exposing Carto's alleged business improprieties, the staffers and their lawyer, William Hulsey, reportedly convinced two elderly directors of the board of the Legion to resign. The remaining third member, Thomas Kerr, appointed a new board which subsequently voted to terminate all association with Carto. Kerr later contended that he was "misled as to the facts" by the rebel staffers, and later rejoined the Cartos in a suit against the Legion.

Carto's Reaction

After receiving his letter of dismissal, according to a Carto mailing sent to IHR contributors, Carto negotiated with Marcellus and O'Keefe to meet with them on October 15 at Hulsey's office to go over all of the corporate documents. Carto apparently failed to show at the meeting and instead went to IHR headquarters, from which, according to his mailing, he sent a fax to Hulsey's office notifying him that he was "now in control of the IHR office." According to the Los Angeles Times, May 8, 1994, those present at

IHR when Carto arrived allege that Carto, his wife, and three other people started to disconnect telephones, change locks, and tamper with computers.

The editors and Hulsey went to IHR, where a fracas ensued. The Los Angeles

Times reported an account of the events as follows:

"It was hard to keep from laughing," recalled Hulsey, the staff attorney who raced to the office after receiving the faxed declaration of war. "Who would control the headquarters? The staff arrives, forces the door and then fistfights start breaking out all over."

Eventually police arrived and Carto was arrested along with some of the other staff members. Charges were never filed against any of them.

Hulsey's last memory of the melee is an indelible image of Willis Carto with one foot wedged in the door. Nearby a staff editor brandished a gun to break up a wrestling match on the floor. Meanwhile, other institute historians were struggling mightily to shove Carto out of the door.

The founder's screams filled the room: "You're killing me!"

Aftermath of the "Battle"

Carto's efforts to regain power over the Legion and IHR moved to the legal arena. Thomas Kerr and Elisabeth Carto filed suit against the Legion for the Survival of Freedom (which now included O'Keefe, Marcellus, Weber, and Raven), and, in turn, the Legion filed suit against the Foundation to Defend the First Amendment (which included Willis and Elisabeth Carto). On August 3, 1994, William Hulsy, counsel for the Legion, told the court that a settlement had been reached, that neither side would take anything from one another, and the cases were dismissed.

The Carto/IHR feud, however, rages on. According to the August 15, 1994 issue of The Spotlight, the IHR filed another lawsuit against Carto, this time with Liberty Lobby as co-defendant, in order to "gain control of purported financial assets they claim belong to a bogus IHR 'board of directors' that the conspirators themselves appointed." Subsequently, according to a September 12, 1994 issue of The Spotlight, Carto filed another lawsuit against "the bogus directors [of IHR] forbidding them to continue fraudulently acting as directors."

Carto has also waged a letter-writing campaign against the "conspirators."

Carto pleaded his case to IHR contributors on stationery with IHR

letterhead, listing as an address a P.O. Box in Torrance, California, which, incidentally, he claims to be the "original and historic address for the IHR since the beginning."

New Voice of Extremism

The Spotlight -- which continues to be overseen by Carto and used as his vehicle for attack -- recently announced in an August 1994 issue the debut of a new Holocaust denial publication to compete with The Journal of Historical Review. The Barnes Review -- named in honor of the late Harry Elmer Barnes, the original revisionist historian of WWI who in his senescence became closely allied with Carto and other Nazi sympathizers -- will be assisted by the staff of The Spotlight, according to an editorial by Carto. The proposed topics which Carto announced would be examined in forthcoming issues of the new publication included: "The truth about Thurgood Marshall and the Supreme Court's desegregation ruling in Brown vs. Board of Education"; "The Federal Reserve--a bankers' conspiracy"; "The mixing of the races in history--what are the results?"; and "What happened to the Cro-Magnons and the Neanderthals? Are remnants of these ancient people living in our world today?" Such features appear to confirm allegations made by the rebel staffers against Carto: that Carto intended to replace Holocaust denial articles in The Journal of Historical Review with more overt racist and nationalist propaganda.

Blaming the Jews. Again

Carto is promoting a conspiracy theory that he hopes will downplay the allegations against him and instead focus on longtime adversaries of IHR and Liberty Lobby. He contends that, among others, the Anti-Defamation League, "forces of political Zionism," and even the Church of Scientology, with which Marcellus is associated, are responsible for his estrangement from IHR. An August 15, 1994 issue of The Spotlight claims "the IHR coup was, in fact, simply a first step in the ultimate goal of the ADL, destruction of Liberty Lobby and The Spotlight." Carto explained his conspiracy theory in an open March 4, 1994, letter to IHR Editorial Advisory Committee member Arthur Butz, "Simply put, what is happening to the IHR is the fourth attempt by its enemies to destroy it ... There is not the slightest doubt in my mind but that the ADL and/or other forces of political Zionism are behind this ..."

Conclusion: Effect of the Conflict on the Holocaust Denial Movement

The impact of the IHR conflict on the Holocaust denial movement's direction and viability remains to be seen. But even if IHR and Carto continue down a self-destructive path, the movement will certainly not fold. Holocaust denial remains a propaganda mainstay for several other extremist figures in the United States, including :

- * George Dietz, publisher of Liberty Bell, a gutter level, pro-Hitler monthly publication;
- * Arthur Butz, the previously mentioned Northwestern University professor of electrical engineering who wrote The Hoax of the Twentieth Century;
- * Bradley Smith of the "Committee for Open Debate on the Holocaust," an organization which continues to place in college newspapers advertisements that deny the Nazi murder of six i million Jews;
- * Jack Wikoff, a self-proclaimed white separatist who started his own anti-Semitic "revisionist" periodical, Remarks, in August 1990;
- * Charles Weber, founder of the one-person Committee for the Reexamination of the History of the Second World War and contributor of several articles to the publications of well known hate groups;
- * Gary Lauck, the leading supplier of Neo-Nazi propaganda abroad, and
- * Hans Schmidt, who founded the German-American National Political Action Committee to promote Holocaust "revisionism" and to fight what it perceives to be an anti-German sentiment on television and in the news.

In addition, certain Black extremists in the United States have ridiculed and sought to cast doubt upon the horrors of the Holocaust. [See ADL report "Uncommon Ground: The Black African Holocaust Council and Other Links Between White and Black Extremists" (1994)]

Furthermore, this brand of "revisionism" extends well beyond the United States. In Canada, Ernst Christof Friedrich Zundel has been an active pro-Nazi propagandist for over two decades. His materials defending Hitler and the Third Reich and denying the Holocaust have been mailed to numerous individuals in Canada, the United States, and elsewhere. French Revisionists include the aforementioned Robert Faurisson, and Henri Roques,

who became the center of a controversy for submitting a Holocaust-denying doctoral thesis which was approved by the University of Nantes in 1985.

The question of whether or not the movement's guru, Willis Carto, will maintain a prominent position in IHR is less important than how effectively Holocaust denial propaganda can be countered. The denial or distortion of the Holocaust has served many groups of the radical right, as well as some on the radical left, in their campaigns to attack Jews and the State of Israel, and to justify their own totalitarian agenda. Wherever they operate, these propagandists find small but fertile ground to cultivate their intellectual fraud among those people ignorant of or indifferent to the fact that Nazi Germany deemed Jews and other religious, ethnic, and cultural minorities subhuman, and in so doing, itself succumbed to inhumanity. Most importantly, an increasing distance separates this generation from the events of World War II. As the survivors themselves pass from the scene, and as hollow comparisons proliferate, the danger of losing sight of the Holocaust's unique place in history grows.

In response to this propaganda, measures to preserve the memory of Hitler's victims have taken on a new importance. Education on the Holocaust, at both the secondary school and college levels, the establishment of Holocaust museums, other programs, and public exposure of these hateful propagandists are vital tools in upholding the promise never to forget.